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English across Asian Literatures

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Abstract

This paper outlines the dimensions of Asia's English, which constitutes a world of its own in linguistic, cultural, interactional, ideological, and political terms. The questions this paper raises are: What conditions must a transplanted colonial language satisfy to be accepted as part of the colonized's linguistic repertoire? Why not consider Asian Englishes as part of a local pluralistic linguistic heritage? Answers to these questions demand redefining the concept of «nativeness» and types of nativeness; this paper advances that proposal by describing the distinction between «genetic nativeness» and «functional nativeness». The remainder of the paper comprises the sections: Asian presence of English; domains of functions; the albatross of mythology; mythology and the Asian context; decolonizing context and text; canonicity, diversity and Asian English; English on Asian terms; and institutionalization of Asian Englishes. In concluding, the paper briefly considers the often repeated question: Where do we go with Asian Englishes?

Key words: Asian Englishes; English in Asian Context; Asianization of English; World Englishes.

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1. Introduction

This paper is yet another expression of what Peter Strevens, using Marlowe's words, has called «the outward sign of inward fires».[1] We are now at the

1. See, Peter Strevens' «Foreword to the Second edition», in Kachru (ed.) (1992: xii).

threshold of another millennium —the year 2000. And ELT professionals are busy designing plans for what is called «English 2000».[2] The debate on the theoretical and applied conceptualizations of the field of English studies has acquired a unique vitality in its various incarnations around the world. Now is the time to take another look, in this new context, at our conceptualization of world Englishes in Asia —or what may be called «the world of Asian English».

I have chosen the title «English as an Asian language» to alter the focus of our ongoing debate on this linguistic icon. The English language is generally discussed as a language that is in Asia, but not of Asia. And this perception raises challenging questions about the immigrant status of a language and the rights of a language to naturalization. I believe that answers to these questions are important, particularly for linguistically and culturally pluralistic Asian societies. And, so far as English is considered, these questions are not less important for societies that have traditionally considered themselves, linguistically or culturally, homogeneous. I would like to briefly outline the dimensions of English that I have emphasized over three decades —the acculturation and nativization of the language and the resultant Englishization of other languages and literatures.

There is no paucity of metaphors, in Asia or elsewhere, to refer to various attitudes toward world Englishes. The metaphors «the world language», «the language on which the sun never sets», and «a universal language» refer to the imperial spread of the language. Then there are metaphors of distance and otherness which refer to the deception perceived in the medium and its messages, for example, «a Trojan horse», «the other tongue», and «step-daughter». And on the other extreme is the characterization of the English language as «the most racist of all human languages».[3] In this jungle of metaphors English is Hydra-like with many heads, including one that, in the view of Raja Rao, India's metaphysical writer, is uplifting for, as he says, it «…elevates us all» (1978). Rao has no hesitation in equating English in India with the Brahmanic sacred language Sanskrit. The metaphors «the Flowering Tree» or «the Speaking Tree» point to yet other dimensions of English: its multiculturalism and pluralism.

The discussion that follows perhaps combines some dimensions of all these metaphors, since most of them also represent our Asian perceptions of the language. That, indeed, is not surprising, for Asia comprises a world of its own —linguistic, literary, cultural, ideological and, of course, political.

In this Asian world of English, the prolonged presence of the English language has raised a string of challenging questions that have been discussed in literature, not only in English, but also in other major languages of this vast region (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, Bengali). In Southeast Asia,

2. See Roger Bowers, 1995: 88.
3. See Ngũgĩ (1981).

for example, there has been an articulate and insightful debate in the Philippines, in Japan, and in Singapore. We see now that Hong Kong, Thailand, and Malaysia are gradually becoming active participants in this most controversial and vital linguistic issue of our times. And the reason is that English, in one way or another, has indeed a presence in the most vital aspects of Asian lives —our cultures, our languages, our interactional patterns, our discourse, our economies and indeed in our politics. But above all, in transforming our identities, as individuals and societies, and the identities of our languages. These transformations are evident in a variety of contact languages and literatures, both in Asia and other parts of the world.

What is now a vibrant —and sometimes contentious— linguistic debate across cultures has indeed been present in colonial Asia for most of its history. And now, during the post-1960s, this debate has acquired a new vitality, added concerns, and a variety of daunting dimensions. The presence of this debate is indeed a good sign. It is not uncommon to be asked: Whose language is English, anyway?

In this cross-cultural debate —not necessarily restricted to Asia— I would like to add two epistemological concerns. I shall pose them as two questions that are relevant not only to our debate on world Englishes, but also to the language wars which continue in our multilingual societies. What makes it easier to ask these two questions at this time is the intensity of the debate about rethinking English studies which was initiated in the 1960s. This rethinking is evident, for example, in the Solidarity Seminar on Language and Development that was organized in Manila (see Gonzalez ed. 1988).

The first question is: What conditions must a transplanted colonial language fulfill to be accepted as part of the colonizees' linguistic repertoire? This question takes us to the second one: Why not consider the reincarnated English in the Philippines, Singapore, and India —to offer just three examples— a part of our local pluralistic linguistic heritage? After all, English has been with us in various parts of Asia for almost 200 years. That compares very well indeed with the introduction of English in the USA, in Australia, and in New Zealand.

I raised these questions with reference to English in India's multilingual context in the 1980s (Kachru 1989). In India, as is well known, there is a continued agonizing and schizophrenic debate about the status of English and its role in the region. The story of this debate actually goes back to the 1830s, when Thomas Macaulay's Minute introduced a language policy for the subcontinent with English as its major component.

The multilingual societies, which have passed through a host of post-colonial contexts, must confront these two questions for pragmatic, political, and economic reasons —but more so for strengthening the pluralistic foundations of our societies. I believe that sociocultural and sociolinguistic reasons of convergence and cultural interaction have made it vital that we redefine the concepts of the nativeness and the distance-marking otherness of the languages we use.

2. The types of nativeness

The aim of my two questions about the conditions of acceptance of English is to suggest a distinction between *genetic* nativeness and *functional* nativeness of the languages in our multilingual linguistic repertoires.

2.1. Genetic nativeness:

The historical relationship between, for example, Hindi, Kashmiri, and Bengali and India's Indo-Aryan group of languages is genetic. This relationship is thus different from, for example, that of the Dravidian languages, such as Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam with Sanskrit. The interface between the Dravidian group of languages and Sanskrit is the result of extended contact, convergence, and the underlying cultural traditions. It is through such contact that languages belonging to distinct language families have developed shared formal features. It is again on this basis that South Asia has been characterized a linguistic, sociolinguistic, and a literary area.[4] I am sure that such typologies of shared identities —linguistic, literary, and cultural— have been proposed for other regions of Asia, too: for example, Southeast Asia, the Pacific region.

2.2. Functional nativeness

Functional nativeness is not necessarily related to genetic nativeness. Functional parameters are determined by the *range* and *depth* of a language in a society: *Range* refers to the domains of function, and *depth* refers to the degree of social penetration of the language. These two variables provide good indicators of comparative functions of languages in a society and of acquired identities and types of acculturation represented by a transplanted language. In determining functional nativeness one must consider, for example:

1. the sociolinguistic status of a variety in its transplanted context;
2. the functional domains in which the language is used;
3. the creative processes used at various levels to articulate local identities;
4. the linguistic exponents of acculturation and nativization;
5. the types of crossover contributing to a new canon; and
6. the attitude-specifying labels used for the variety.[5]

4. For a detailed discussion specifically on India as a linguistic area see, e.g., Emeneau (1956) and Masica (1976) as a sociolinguistic area, see, e.g., D'souza (1987) and as a literary area see, e.g., Kachru (1992: 150).
5. See for references Kachru in Bailey and Görlach (1983).

3. Asian presence of English

The answers to the above two questions are essentially determined by the contexts in which English is used in Asia. The following contexts come to mind:

1. *historical*, with reference to the language policies of major regions and the place of English in such contexts;
2. *functional*, within the contexts of the uses of English in various domains;
3. *formal*, with reference to major productive processes which mark the nativization of English;
4. *sociocultural*, with reference to the acculturation of English within the social and cultural contexts of the region;
5. *creative*, with reference to, for example, literary genres, professional genres, and the news media;
6. *educational*, with reference to the status and use of English in the educational system at various levels in, and types of, educational institutions; and
7. *attitudinal*, with reference to the users' attitudes toward the models and methods appropriate for the local users.

3.1. Asian English within the three circles

If we consider Asian Englishes within the perspectives discussed above, one notices five important facts.

The first fact is that Asia provides an integrated profile of English within the 'concentric circles' model of the spread of English. This model, says McArthur (1993: 334)

> […] is a more dynamic model than the standard version, and allows for all manner of shadings and overlaps among the circles. Although 'inner' and 'outer' still suggest —inevitably— a historical priority and the attitudes which go with it, the metaphor of ripples in a pond suggests mobility and flux and implies that a new history is in the making.

The 'inner circle' is represented by Australia and New Zealand, where English functions primarily as a first language. The 'outer circle' is represented by, for example, India, Singapore, and the Philippines, where English is used as an institutionalized additional language; and the 'expanding circle' is represented by, for example, China, Thailand, Taiwan, and Korea, where English is used primarily as a foreign language. All three circles of English present in Asia have certain shared characteristics. These are: (a) that all the varieties are transplanted varieties; and (b) that these varieties comprise the formal and functional distinctiveness of the diaspora varieties of English in various degrees.

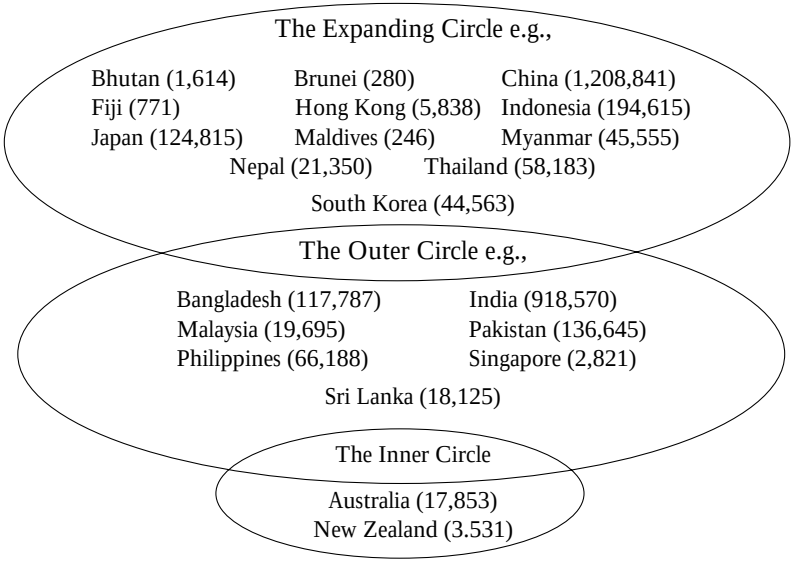

Figure 1. Three concentric circles of Asian Englishes (populations in thousands).

The second fact about English as an Asian language is that its demographic profile is overwhelming, while the diffusion of English is primarily initiated and sustained by Asian efforts:

1. In China alone, there are over 200 million students enrolled in programs in English as a foreign langauge (see Yong and Campbell 1995).
2. My earlier figure of over 60 million users of of English in India is already out of date. A recent survey conducted in India (*India Today*, August 18, 1997) shows that «contrary to the [Indian] census myth that English is the language of a microscopic minority, the poll indicates that almost one in every three Indians claims to understand English although less than 20 percent are confident of speaking it». As the estimated population of India is almost 1 billion, the figures above indicate that almost 333 million Indians understand English and almost 200 million have some spoken competence in the language. That means India now has an English-using speech community equal to the population of the Inner Circle (the USA, the UK, and Canada).The users of English in the two Asian giants, China and India, add up to 533 million. That is a monumental figure and its implications are immense: linguistically, ideologically, culturally, and indeed ethically.
3. English is the main medium in demand for acquisition of bilingualism/ multilingualism in the whole Asian region;

4. In parts of Asia (e.g., in Singapore) English is gradually acquiring the status of the dominant language or the first language —whatever we mean by that term.

The third fact concerns the extensive creativity in the language in a broad variety of literary genres. The innovations in the medium and the acculturation of the messages that the medium conveys has resulted in an unprecedented crossover of the language (see Thumboo 1992 and Kachru 1994 and 1995a).

The fourth fact relates to the types of links English has established among various levels of society in the region. Consider, for example, the following: (a) almost every metropolitan city has a newspaper in English, and a radio station that transmits news in English; (b) with a few exceptions these vehicles of information are managed in local (nativized) varieties of English; and (c) the initiatives in planning, administration, and funding for the acquisition and spread of English are primarily in the hands of those Asians who use English as an additional language.

Finally, there is the ideological fact. In this region there is a most articulate on-going debate about three major ideological issues related to English: its colonial construct, its ideological impact, and its hegemonic implications for the cultures. These questions indeed bring forth a string of issues related to Westernization, to the creation of conflicting identities, and, above all, to the types of hegemonies (see Kachru 1997).

4. Domains of function

There are the following types of domains of function for Asian English:[6]

— specific to the inner circle;
— specific to the outer circle;
— specific to the expanding circle;
— shared by all three circles. (see Table 1).

The overwhelming nature of the functional domains of world Englishes become clearer once we compare their range and depth with other languages of wider communication.

5. The albatross of mythology

The mythology about English as a language, its curriculum, its research agendas, and its pedagogy, continue to be constructed and imposed in a deliberate and planned way as a loaded weapon. The mythology manifests itself in the

6. Note that the + in the case of outer and expanding circles is not, of course, to be interpreted to mean that English is the only language used in the domains of advertising, literary creativity, news broadcasts, newspapers, and social interaction. The details are not discussed here.

Table 1. Functional domains of English across the three circles

Function	Inner circle	Outer circle	Expanding circle
Access Code	+	+	+
Advertising	+	+	+
Corporate trade	+	+	+
Development	+	+	+
Government	+	+	
Linguistic impact	+	+	+
Literary creativity	+	+	+
Literary renaissance	+	+	+
News broadcasting	+	+	+
Newspapers	+	+	+
Scientific higher edu.	+	+	+
Scientific research	+	+	+
Social interaction	+	+	+

norms of language, reactions to creativity and innovations, and recognition of canons (see Kachru 1996).

The power of the mythology is immense —it is like a linguistic albatross around the necks of the users of the language. The result is that innovative initiatives are paralyzed and result in self-doubt when there is a conflict with the paradigms of authority —and there still are such dominant external paradigms present in Asia, including in the outer circle. The dominant paradigms establish the norms of control that function like linguistic chains. The chains of control include assumptions/hypotheses about the following:

1. language production with reference to standards;
2. language function with reference to models of ESP, schemas for genres of writing, and communicative competence;
3. channels of authentication and authority with reference to native vs. non-native status;
4. criteria for legitimization of the canon and innovations in creativity within a canon;
5. standardization of performance tests in evaluation of competence; and
6. definitions of interactional concepts such as intelligibility, etc.

The power of mythology is imperceptible until we see its underlying presence in the formation of hypotheses, definitions of contexts, and legitimization of methods and methodology. What is more, as Lévi-Strauss argues, «a myth offers us a grid», and it is the grid that

> […] makes it possible to decipher a meaning, not of the myth itself but of all the rest —images of the world, of society, of history, that hover on the threshold of consciousness, with the questions men ask about them. The matrix of intelligibility makes it possible to combine them all into a coherent whole (cited in Eribon 1991: 141).

The myths have a way of acquiring a life of their own. There are agencies of control which intentionally use mythology as a foundation for models and for various paradigms.

In my earlier papers I have discussed these myths in several contexts (see Kachru 1995b and later). I will mention here three sets of such myths to illustrate the point. These three sets have one thing in common: they establish, as Foucault (1980) asserts, the «régimes of truth». In this particular case these «régimes of truth» are of three distinct types.

— The first set defines and determines the rank and hierarchy of interlocutors, e.g.,
  Myth 1: The *native speaker* idealization myth,
  Myth 2: The *native* vs. *nonnative* speaker interaction myth.
— The second set constrains both the message and the medium, e.g.,
  Myth 3: The culture identity (or monoculture) myth,
  Myth 4: The exocentric norm myth.
— The third set legitimizes the control of innovations, creativity, and linguistic experimentation, e.g.
  Myth 5: The interlanguage myth,
  Myth 6: The Cassandra myth.

My concern about this mythology is specifically related to English. But it cuts across languages and is present in other languages of wider communication in Asia, in Africa, and in Europe. What this mythology and the resultant chains of control negate is the vital sociolinguistic and identity-denoting concept of *pluricentricity*. What that means is that world Englishes have a plurality of centers. These centers:

1. provide the norms and models for its acquisition;
2. develop methods and materials for appropriate localized pedagogical goals;
3. use innovations in literary creativity, genre development, and region-specific ESPs;
4. develop linguistic materials for authentication and local and regional codification;
5. recognize convergence of English with local languages (e.g., Chinese, Malay, Tamil, Hindi, Tagalog, Thai) as a natural process of convergence and acculturation; and
6. consider the formal processes of nativization as an integral part of the linguistic variety and incorporate these features in the local dictionaries, and teaching materials of the variety.

The Asian world of English, then, comprises two distinct types of users of the language: those who use an institutionalized variety and those who use a performance variety, corresponding respectively to:

1. norm-providing users: (a) L1 norms (eg. Australia, New Zealand), and (b) L2 norms (eg. the Philippines, Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong);
2. norm-dependent users (eg. China, Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea).

The most significant dimension of pluricentricity is that the regional varieties of English have primarily local, regional, and interregional contexts of use: Singaporeans with Thais, Japanese with Indians, and south and west Asians with west, east, or south Africans and Europeans. The situation of predetermined interlocutors (native vs. nonnative) has no pragmatic validity. And this pragmatic fact has serious implications in our continued subordination to ELT mythology.

6. Mythology and the Asian context

The acceptance of this mythology is not always innocent. There are contexts in which the use of the mythology is initiated for cultural, religious, ideological, and economic ends. I can be more specific than that and illustrate my point by three examples: those of Japan, the Philippines, and India. These countries provide insights about the motivations for the initial introduction of English in these three Asian regions and about the continued direct and indirect efforts to maintain the «régimes of truth» in theory, in methodology, and in other constructs of ELT. The Japanese case is interesting from yet another perspective. In Japan, proposals were made by some Japanese to abandon the native tongue, Japanese, and adopt some «better, richer, stronger language, such as English or French» (Miller 1977: 41). And Mori Arinori even argued that «all reasons suggest its [the language of Japan] disuse» (see Kachru 1995c, Mori 1873: i, vi, cited in Hall 1973: 189).

There was not just the suggestion that Japan adopt English as its «national language», but there was a more extreme suggestion that the Japanese should acquire the ethnic qualities of Caucasians by intermarriage with them. That indeed is just one side of the Japanese romance with English. There is yet another side —more virulent, more questioning, and extremely resentful of the hegemonic roles of the language. I am particularly thinking of the reactions toward *eikawa* (English Conversation Ideology) which is not to be confused with acquisition of competence and proficiency in spoken English (see Lummis 1976). In our times *eikawa* is a unique example of cultural and psychological domination of the mind in which the ELT profession, by design, participated and perhaps continues to participate. The major points of *eikawa* are:

1. it «…involves emotional attachment to and obsessive infatuation with Western, especially American, culture» (Tsuda 1992: 32);
2. it equates «the ideal speaking partner» with a «white middle class American» (Lummis 1976: 10);

3. it elevates a particular type of «native speaker» to a position of cultural superiority and cultivates specific attitudes toward the Caucasian race in general;
4. it represents «the ideology and the structure of the subculture», which is «racist» (Lummis 1976: 7);
5. it represents the idea of the «native speaker», which in Lummis's view (1976: 7), is «mostly a fraud»; and
6. its use of the term «native speaker» is exploited by business-oriented language schools for financial exploitation.

The second case, that of the Philippines, in many ways is identical to that of South Asia and parts of Africa. In these areas English was introduced partly for its «civilizing» effect. In 1898, when the arm of power of the USA reached the Philippines, it ended 300 years of Spanish domination. It is believed that President McKinley had a distinct agenda for this newly acquired colony. The agenda was «to educate the Filipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them to fit the people for the duties of citizenship» (cited in Beebe and Beebe 1981: 322).

The agents of colonial expansion on the other side of the Atlantic in South Asia did not have a much different agenda. We see that, in the case of the Indian subcontinent, Charles Grant believed that

> […] the true curse of darkness is the introduction of light. The Hindoos err, because they are ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them, would prove the best remedy for their disorders. (Grant 1831-1832: 60-61)

And in that part of the colonial world English was again introduced as a tool of «enlightenment», of «light», and of «civilization».

What I have just said about the colonial linguistic arm in the three parts of the world is not the end of the story. It was repeated in other parts of the world with equal vigor, commitment, and conviction, and often with extensive and ruthless might.

But all that is in the past, and we are rightly told «You can never plan the future by the past» (Bowers 1995). That indeed is true. This dilemma reflects in the agony and ecstasy we witness over the continued uses of English, not only in Asia but around the world.[7]

6.1. Current Strategies

What we see now is that the earlier agendas have not really been abandoned. What has changed is the way the agenda is presented and the strategies that

7. See, Kachru 1996.

are used for its implementation. Roger Bowers, one of the senior officers of the British Council, insightfully makes it clear that «the promotion of the English language is absolutely central» as one of the «Charter obligations» of the British Council (1995: 88). And he continues that

> […] we want to maintain the position of the English language as a world language so that it can serve on the widest possible stage as the vehicle for *our national values and heritage*… I must confess that, (Bowers adds) «along with those of other English-speaking nations» (1995: 88; emphasis added).

We must give Bowers credit for being even more outspoken than that. He immediately agrees that «we have then a vested interest in maintaining the roles of English as a language, *and of British ELT as a trade and a profession*» (1995: 88; emphasis added).

What does Bowers' declaration sound like? And, here I quote his own words:

> Now this begins to sound dangerously like linguistic imperialism, and if Braj Kachru were here, he would strongly object (as he has in the past) to putting national before supranational interests and to placing commerce before philosophy (1995: 88).

The English language, then, according to Bowers' statement, is an asset and instrument to the British, as a vehicle of British values and culture, and as a resource for trade and profession.

This is a «national» agenda and perspective on English. And this perspective has been put more directly —and less diplomatically— by the director of «a dynamic worldwide chain of English language schools» who told Phillipson, the author of *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992): «once we used to send gunboats and diplomats abroad; now we are sending English teachers»(8).

And now what does one say about the other part of Bowers' observation: Should one object to the Charter-mandated function of the British Council as «linguistic imperialism»? That indeed depends on the interpretation, and I will not discuss that question here.

7. Decolonizing context and text

The conceptualization of world Englishes has introduced other dimensions for the types of crossover in contexts and texts in Englishes. We find the use of terms such as «decolonization» (see, e.g., Dissanayake 1985; Thumboo 1985), «dehegemonization» (e.g., Kandiah 1995; Parakrama 1995), and «liberation linguistics» (see Quirk 1988, 1989). These valuable concepts are used in more than one way.[8]

8. For a detailed discussion see Kachru 1996.

First, they are used with reference to the contextualization of English in functions which are distinct from —and often contrary to— the original colonial agenda of the language and its presuppositions. Second, they are used with reference to assertions about the stylistic identities of the medium, as opposed to the messages that the medium conveys. Third, they are used with reference to placing the varieties of English within the larger contexts of shared formal and functional identities. This conceptualization has contributed to the use of regional identity-marking terms such as the Africanization or South Asianization of English (see e.g., Bokamba 1982 [1992], Kachru 1981). The Asianization or Asian English is yet another dimension of their contextualization. Fourth, they are used with reference to the 'dehegemonization of English', primarily with reference to methodological and pedagogical concerns.

The positions of the above groups are obviously not in tune with one another. Indeed, the ranks are becoming more and more clearly defined (see, e.g., what has been termed the Quirk/Kachru controversy in Tickoo 1991). The major points of the above controversies are:

1. that the internationalization of English has come at a price;
2. that there is nothing like *international* English, but there are international functions of English;
3. that pluralism and diversity are an integral part of the internationalization of the language;
4. that the earlier paradigms (linguistic, literary, and pedagogical) are flawed on several counts and these do not address current overwhelming cross-cultural and cross-linguistic roles of the language.

In a broader conceptualization of world Englishes these issues take us to larger concerns: those of canonicity and diversity.

8. Canonicity, diversity, and Asian English

The issues related to canonicity, pluralism, and diversity are not simple. These concerns demand a fresh view about canon formation in language and literature. Questions related to canonicity have had to be faced with both diaspora of the language.

In this increasingly confrontational war of canons the basic issues relate to the following four points: a) legitimacy of the canon, b) attitudes toward the canon, c) hierarchy of canons, and d) canonicity and marginality. The participants in this war of canons represent three broad groups: established or hegemonizing canon(s); «loose» canons; and canons under cannon.

When I say that there are canons under cannon, I am not referring to the Asian, African, or African-American canon. A recent example is that of the hegemonizing canon in relation to Scottish. James Kelman, the author of *How Late It Was, How Late*, who received the prestigious Brooker Prize

in 1994, experienced it recently. The New York Times (November 29, 1994: p. B1-2) reported that

> In his heavy Scottish accent [Kelman] made a rousing case for the culture and language of «indigenous» people outside of London. […] «A fine line can exist between elitism and racism», he said. «On matters concerning language and culture, the distinction can sometimes cease to exist altogether».

Recalling times when Glaswegian accents were banned from the radio or when his two daughters were «reprimanded» in school for using the Scottish «aye» instead of English «yes», he said it was wrong to call the language of his work «vernacular» or «dialect».

And not many years ago (just over half a century ago) the same attitude was expressed about American literature in Britain. The great pandit of the American language summarizes well the British attitude to American English when he writes that «This occasional tolerance for things American was never extended to the American language». This was in 1936 (Mencken 1936). And now one might ask: Is this attitude about American English in Britain dead?

The answer to this question is 'no'; one does not have to go too far for the evidence. It was not too long ago that Prince Charles said that the American version of the language was «very corrupting» and that the English version was the «proper» one. He told the British Council that «we must act now to ensure that English (and that, to my way of thinking, means English English) maintains its position as the world language well into the next century» (Chicago Tribune, March 24, 1995: section 1, p. 4). And Prince Charles is not alone in taking this position; others like him are jealously guarding what is perhaps the only major export commodity left with Britain. It is, therefore, rightly claimed that «Britain's real black gold is not North Sea oil, but the English language. […] It's difficult to qualify a national resource. The value of having, in the post-industrial age, people use the language of one's own culture is virtually inestimable». («Selling English by the pound», Times, October 24, 1989, p. 14: cited in Romaine 1992: 254). We cannot say that Prince Charles does not understand that.

And now, for us, the question is: Is there an Asian canon of English? I believe there is as I have said in several earlier papers (e.g., Kachru 1994 and later).

9. English on Asian terms

One might argue that the roles of English in Asia have already acquired functional nativeness, and that Asia's English must be viewed in terms of that nativeness, which includes uses of English

1. as a vehicle of communication across distinct linguistic and cultural groups at one level of interaction;

2. as a nativized medium for articulating local identities within and across Asia;
3. as one of the pan-Asian languages of creativity;
4. as a language that has developed its own subvarieties indicating penetration at various levels; and
5. as a language that continues to elicit a unique love-hate relationship that, nevertheless, has not seriously impeded its spread, functions, and prestige.

The implications of focusing on the Asianess of English and its Asian identities demand that we consider the message that the myths about English convey to us (see sections 5 and 6 above). One important exponent of English on Asian terms is the use of English as Caliban's linguistic weapon —the integrative and liberating function of the language in one level of colonized societies. We can, of course, make a case for the disintegrative (should I say «colonial»?) roles of English as the medium of Western culture and values and so on. That is only one part of the story. We see that even Caliban could take only so much abuse: the Empire not only «talked» back but it «wrote» back.[9] The result of that legacy is the vibrant political discourse in South Asia —both unifying and divisive— and the fast-increasing Asian writing in English in Singapore, in the Philippines, in India, in Sri Lanka, and so on.

In culturally, linguistically, and ideologically pluralistic societies there is a complex hybridity: it operates at all levels. One has to answer a string of questions about such hybridity: which language, ethnicity, and, yes, religion is colonial, less colonial, and not colonial at all? In the case of South Asia one has to ask questions about Persian and the linguistic outgrowth of the Persian-South Asian contact with Urdu/ Hindustani. One has to ask questions about the spread of Sanskrit and Hindi in the Dravidian South. In the case of parts of Africa, one might ask: Why is Swahili less colonial than, say, English? My answer again is that the medium is only superficially important, what is vital is the message. That does not, however, mean that the medium does not articulate identities: indeed it does. That is a sociolinguistic reality.

Once a language establishes its autonomy, it is actually liberated, and its «liberated» uses and functions have to be separated from its non-liberated uses. That is why Raja Rao does not consider English just «…as a guest or friend, but as one of our own, of our caste, our creed, our sect and of our tradition». Rao is more emphatic than that: he gives English equal status with Sanskrit. When asked, «Why write in English?» Rao's response is:

> Historically, this is how I am placed. I'm not interested in being a European but in being me. But the whole of the Indian tradition, as I see it, is in my work. There is an honesty in choosing English, an honesty in terms of history. (In Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 1992: 144)

9. For further discussion and references see Kachru 1997.

There surely are «colonial Englishes», and «Eurocentric» and «racist» Englishes. But these constructs refer to the use of the medium. Such flaws are not intrinsic in the language. This point can surely be illustrated from English, but it can with equal ease be illustrated from Sanskrit, German, Persian, Japanese, Chinese, and Swahili —the list goes on and on. One can make a case for discourse and narrative of racism, sexism, Brahmanism, and Casteism in Sanskrit. And such cases have been made. In fact, the prejudice went so far that the Indian Pandits refused to teach Sanskrit to Europeans, as they were considered *mleccha* (impure), and not fit to acquire the *devavānī*, 'God's language', Sanskrit.

10. Institutionalization of Asian English

My contextualization of English as an Asian language entails an Asian perspective in theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical terms. I shall discuss these very briefly here.

In theoretical terms, the focus must shift from the monolingual paradigms to paradigms relevant and appropriate to multilingual and multicultural societies. It is not just a matter of conceptualization, but also one of appropriate methodology for research in such societies. Once the importance of paradigm shift is realized, we will certainly realize the limitations of our current imported materials and colonial constructs, their limitations in terms of our multilingual and multicultural societies, and their economic ends. I am particularly thinking of the methods of English language teaching, the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic claims for success of ESP (English for Special Purposes), and the use and pedagogical validity of packaged «toolboxes» for various genres. And of equal importance are the ideological issues and assumptions that underlie ESP and genre studies and research.

11. Conclusion

And now, in conclusion, let me ask: Where do we go with Asian English? My crystal ball indicates that in the year 2000 and beyond the English language in its various incarnations will be still with us. It has unique functions, unparalleled domains, and overwhelming diversity. It changes its face in each continent, in each region, and in each English-using nation. The colonial dimension of the language is just one dimension. And the constructs of identities with this medium across cultures is yet another dimension —a rewarding dimension.

Wole Soyinka's response to the colonial past of the language is very insightful —indeed, very refreshing; he says that English has turned into «a new medium of communication», and thus represents «a new organic series of mores, social goals, relationships, universal awareness —all of which go into the creation of a new culture». That much about the pragmatic realities which English conveys in Soyinka's view. But how was this African reality

and pragmatism brought into the language? Soyinka uses a very potent metaphor when he says that

> [b]lack people twisted the linguistic blade in the hands of the traditional cultural castrator and carved new concepts into the flesh of white supremacy. (1993: 88)

And the result, says Soyinka, is «the conversion of the enslaving medium into an insurgent weapon».

What Soyinka says about Africa is indeed already true in the world of English in Asia. What Soyinka means when he says that «black people» are «carving new concepts» by the use of the medium and what Quirk means by «liberation linguistics» is actually one of the major strengths of the English language in Asia. We cannot overlook the significance of such a conceptualization for Asian uses of English. These arguments have more significant theoretical, methodological, and sociological relevance than the mere mantras of the colonial constructs of the English language.

We now have two fast developing genres of a body of literature concerning the roles of English in the colonial world. One expresses the «guilt» of the Colonizee users of the language —the genre of guilt. And the other attempts to search and seek out the Colonizer within one's self —the genre of atonement.

The approach of linguistic guilt and atonement somehow bewilders the minds of the once-colonized like me. I am a product of both the pre- and post-Colonial eras of the Indian subcontinent, and not one of what Rushdie calls «midnight's children».

A majority of us Asians have experienced layer after layer of colonizers' (and conquerors') onslaughts —and most such onslaughts have left their cultural and linguistic imprints. A large part of such (not always welcome) imprints have been assimilated by us and have become a part of our multicultural and multilingual legacies. We soberly transmit these legacies to our children, to our future generations. And I would like to believe that transmission (unconscious or conscious) takes place without any guilt.

In my case, these linguistic and cultural layers —including some that are results of unwelcome onslaughts— include Afghan, Persian, Sikh, Dogra, British, and so on. Where does it leave me, linguistically, culturally, in literary creativity and in types of sociocultural changes? I ask: confused? multicultural? linguistically «converged»? enriched? or just «colonized» with a variety of layers? We cannot express guilt about only one «layer» —that of English. What happens to the other layers? We cannot use strategies that will destabilize us in terms of our tradition of assimilative multilingual and multicultural identities. That to me is both disruptive and self-defeating. I believe that linguistic and cultural hybridity is our identity.

Our major strategy, then, is that of Wole Soyinka, that of Raja Rao and of Edwin Thumboo: acculturate the language in our contexts of use, on our terms, Asian terms. The Australian Robert Hughes (now in the USA) is right when he says that «[i]n society, as in farming, monoculture works poorly, it

exhausts the soil» (cited in Gates, Jr. 993: 115). In this case, he is talking of the USA.

And now, let us take this vision beyond the USA, to South and East Asia, to the Pacific, to Australia: to, that is, the Eastern Hemisphere. That abstract vision of a majority of the human population, with its linguistic diversity, cultural interfaces, social hierarchies, and conflicts, is represented in various strands of Asian English, in Asian terms. I see it, for example, in Singapore, in Malaysia, in the Philippines, in India, and in Australia.

The architects of each tradition, each strand, have moulded, reshaped, acculturated, redesigned, and, by doing so, enriched what was a Western medium. The result is a liberated English which contains vitality, innovation, linguistic mix, and cultural identity. And, it is not the creativity of the monolingual and the monocultural; this creativity has rejuvenated the medium from «exhaustion» and has «liberated» it in many ways.[10]

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